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STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS FOR THE ERADICATION OF POVERTY

Policy and programme considerations in the formulation of integrated strategies for poverty eradication, meeting the basic human needs of all and promotion of self-reliance and community-based initiatives

Report of the Secretary-General

CONTENTS

	Paragraphs	Page
INTRODUCTION	1 - 3	3
I. FORMULATION OF INTEGRATED STRATEGIES	4 - 23	4
A. Main recommendations of the Copenhagen Programme of Action	4 - 7	4
B. Areas for policy development and further discussion	8 - 23	6
II. MEETING THE BASIC HUMAN NEEDS OF ALL	24 - 33	9
A. Main recommendations of the Copenhagen Programme of Action	24 - 26	9

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CONTENTS (continued)

		Paragraphs	Page
	B. Areas for policy development and further discussion	27 - 33	13
III.	PROMOTION OF SELF-RELIANCE AND COMMUNITY-BASED INITIATIVES	34 - 44	15
	A. Main recommendations of the Copenhagen Programme of Action	34 - 36	15
	B. Areas for policy development and further discussion	37 - 44	15
IV.	COORDINATED INTERNATIONAL ACTION IN SUPPORT OF NATIONAL AND LOCAL EFFORTS	45 - 58	17
	A. Main recommendations of the Copenhagen Programme of Action	45 - 46	17
	B. Areas for policy development and further discussion	47 - 58	18

INTRODUCTION

1. In accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 1995/324, the Commission for Social Development, at its special session in 1996, will consider the substantive theme Strategies and actions for the eradication of poverty, with the sub-themes:

(a) Formulation of integrated strategies;

(b) Meeting the basic human needs of all;

(c) Promotion of self-reliance and community-based initiatives.

2. The Commission is to consider the theme of poverty with a view to making recommendations on how to implement pertinent recommendations of the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development 1/ at the national and local levels, taking into account also supporting actions called for from the international community, mindful of the goals and objectives of the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty (1996). 2/

3. In the present report, the main recommendations adopted by the Social Summit in regard to the above theme and sub-themes are recalled in summary form. Key areas that call for further policy development in order to assist implementation are indicated. Various options are outlined for consideration by public authorities and other social actors on which the Commission might wish to make suggestions and recommendations. They might constitute the substantive contribution of the Commission to the elaboration, by the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly, of a programme for the first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (1997-2006). 3/ It may be noted that the present report deals only with some dimensions of the outcome of the Social Summit with regard to poverty. Poverty is more than a problem of distribution, and needs to be tackled by more than redistributive policies and efficient social service provisioning. It is also - and fundamentally - a problem of exclusion from access to productive assets, resources and opportunities. Thus, the overall policy framework should be geared towards supporting increased, more effective and more equitable participation of all people in productive activities and ensuring more equitable distribution of the fruits of economic growth. This is particularly important during stabilization and adjustment periods, when concern with macroeconomic and fiscal equilibria tend to push social and equity concerns to the background. In particular, it may be noted that the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action recognize the importance of creating an enabling environment for poverty eradication, making livelihoods more sustainable and recognizing the role of civil society.

I. FORMULATION OF INTEGRATED STRATEGIES

A. Main recommendations of the Copenhagen Programme of Action

4. The main recommendations in chapter II of the Copenhagen Programme of Action, on integrated strategies, are set out in summary form below.

5. A central recommendation is that Governments should give greater attention to public efforts to eradicate absolute poverty and to reduce overall poverty substantially by:

(a) Promoting sustained economic growth, in the context of sustainable development, and social progress, requiring that growth be broadly based, offering equal opportunities to all people;

(b) Formulating or strengthening, preferably by 1996, and implementing national poverty eradication plans to address the structural causes of poverty, encompassing action on the local, national, subregional, regional and international levels. These plans should establish, within each national context, strategies and affordable time-bound goals and targets for the substantial reduction of overall poverty and the eradication of absolute poverty. In the context of national plans, particular attention should be given to employment creation as a means of eradicating poverty, giving appropriate consideration to health and education, assigning a higher priority to basic social services, generating household income, and promoting access to productive assets and economic opportunities;

(c) Elaborating, at the national level, the measurements, criteria and indicators for determining the extent and distribution of absolute poverty. Further, each country should develop a precise definition and assessment of absolute poverty, preferably by 1996;

(d) Establishing policies, objectives and measurable targets to enhance and broaden women's economic opportunities and their access to productive resources, particularly for women who have no source of income;

(e) Promoting effective enjoyment by all people of civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights, and access to existing social protection and public services, in particular through encouraging the ratification and ensuring the full implementation of relevant human rights instruments;

(f) Eliminating the injustice and obstacles that face women and encouraging and strengthening the participation of women in taking and implementing decisions and their access to productive resources and land ownership and their right to inherit goods.

6. Governments are urged to integrate goals and targets for combating poverty into overall economic and social policies and planning at the local, national and, where appropriate, regional levels by:

(a) Analysing policies and programmes, including those relating to macroeconomic stability, structural adjustment programmes, taxation,

investments, employment, markets and all relevant sectors of the economy, with respect to their impact on poverty and inequality, assessing their impact on family well-being and conditions and their gender implications, and adjusting them, as appropriate, to promote a more equitable distribution of productive assets, wealth, opportunities, income and services;

(b) Redesigning public investment policies that relate to infrastructure development, the management of natural resources and human resource development to benefit people living in poverty and to promote their compatibility with the long-term improvement of livelihoods;

(c) Ensuring that development policies benefit low-income communities and rural and agricultural development;

(d) Selecting, wherever possible, development schemes that do not displace local populations and designing an appropriate policy and legal framework to compensate the displaced for their losses, to help them to re-establish their livelihoods and to promote their recovery from social and cultural disruption;

(e) Designing and implementing environmental protection and resource management measures that take into account the needs of people living in poverty and of vulnerable groups, in accordance with Agenda 21 4/ and the various consensus agreements, conventions and programmes of action adopted in the framework of the follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development;

(f) Establishing and strengthening, as appropriate, mechanisms for the coordination of efforts to combat poverty, in collaboration with civil society, including the private sector, and developing integrated intersectoral and intra-governmental responses for such purposes.

7. There is need periodically to monitor, assess and share information on the performance of poverty eradication plans, evaluate policies to combat poverty, and promote an understanding and awareness of poverty and its causes and consequences. This could be done, by Governments, inter alia, by:

(a) Developing, updating and disseminating specific and agreed gender-disaggregated indicators of poverty and vulnerability, including income, wealth, nutrition, physical and mental health, education, literacy, family conditions, unemployment, social exclusion and isolation, homelessness, landlessness and other factors, and indicators of the national and international causes underlying poverty; for this purpose, gathering comprehensive and comparable data, disaggregated by ethnicity, gender, disability, family status, language groupings, regions and economic and social sectors;

(b) Monitoring and assessing the achievement of goals and targets agreed to in international forums in the area of social development; evaluating, quantitatively and qualitatively, changes in poverty levels, the persistence of poverty and vulnerability to poverty, particularly concerning household income levels and access to resources and services; and assessing the effectiveness of poverty eradication strategies, based on the priorities and perceptions of households living in poverty and low-income communities;

(c) Strengthening international data collection and statistical systems to support countries in monitoring social development goals and encouraging the expansion of international databases to incorporate socially beneficial activities that are not included in available data, such as women's unremunerated work and contributions to society, the informal economy and sustainable livelihoods;

(d) Mobilizing public awareness, in particular through educational institutions, non-governmental organizations and the media, to enable society to prioritize the struggle against poverty, while focusing attention on progress or failure in the pursuit of defined goals and targets;

(e) Mobilizing the resources of universities and research institutions to improve the understanding of the causes of poverty and their solutions, the impact of structural adjustment measures on people living in poverty and the effectiveness of anti-poverty strategies and programmes; strengthening the capacity for social science research in developing countries; and integrating, as appropriate, the results of research into decision-making processes;

(f) Facilitating and promoting the exchange of knowledge and experience, especially among developing countries, through, inter alia, subregional and regional organizations.

B. Areas for policy development and further discussion

8. The Copenhagen Programme of Action provides a rich source of ideas and practical suggestions that might constitute elements of effective national strategies that would command the required political support at national level, in full recognition of both the diversity of country situations and the need for coherent, organized efforts, with a clear purpose. In developing further the orientation and objectives of national strategies, the Commission may wish to focus on the identification of characteristics of poverty which could be common to most countries, regardless of their definition of poverty and which could be used to measure progress; the identification of elements for elaborating national strategies comprising macroeconomic, structural, distributional and regulatory policies, together with specific short- and long-term objectives; and the further identification of specific international actions.

9. The design of an effective strategy from the catalogue of good practices listed in the Programme of Action requires difficult choices, particularly in countries where the population is in greatest need and where resources are typically most meagre. The capacities to prepare national plans for poverty eradication differ, and even in countries where those capacities are weak, the goals can be integrated and mainstreamed into national and local development plans and policy frameworks.

10. Given the multifaceted nature of poverty and its many specific causes and the wide range of possible policy interventions to combat it, responsibility in Governments tends to be diffused, horizontally and vertically. Taking stock of who is responsible for what and redrawing lines of responsibility, if necessary, can be a valuable contribution to the exercise of constructing a strategy.

Dialogue with the private sector and with representatives of civil society on their potential roles can further help to flesh out the programmatic components of a poverty strategy and provide a basis for decisions on the methods and revenue sources of financing specific investments and related recurrent costs of programmes implemented under the strategy.

11. The time-scale in designing strategies will be a major consideration. The adoption of intermediate targets within a longer-term framework has been found practical in some countries where, typically, the framework is periodically adjusted in the light of developments, but without losing sight of the long-term objective.

12. In the key areas of designing and constructing national poverty eradication strategies - setting priorities, assigning responsibilities and selecting a time-frame - the experience gained in different countries should be seen as an important international resource. Direct and frequent contacts among policy makers and officials for exchanging experience on such issues need to be facilitated.

13. In countries where a large proportion of the population lives at or close to the subsistence level, there is little practical difference between a strategy aimed at eradicating absolute poverty and one aimed at promoting the long-term development of the country. In such countries, it is easy to recognize absolute, or abject, poverty but difficult to measure its overall extent and what progress is being made in reducing or eliminating it. When half or more of the population at the lower end of the distribution are in very similar material circumstances and when individuals or families move in and out of poverty by dint of some random change in their situation (drought or flood, death or illness in the family, for example) a poverty-eradication strategy needs to focus on actions to raise the productivity, and hence incomes, of the mass of the population, over the long term.

14. The strategy will typically consist of a mix of efforts to enhance the human capital of individuals, with a special focus on girls and women, and to create economic opportunities in the community by appropriate macroeconomic and micro-economic policies, including facilitating access of the poor to resources such as credit. What the appropriate mix might be, and what macroeconomic policies are best suited to the country circumstances, will require close scrutiny. Appropriate attention to institutional development will also be important.

15. Giving a high priority to eradicating the most extreme forms of poverty by trying to reach the poorest of the poor raises not only practical questions of how it can be done in practice with limited resources, material and administrative but also difficult questions of social justice. A factor to consider is the identity of the very poor. In summary they are those whose ownership of assets or access to productive resources and whose capacity to participate in new opportunities is so low as to make it difficult for them to have the basic minimum of consumption and services required for a decent life. They may be the landless poor, artisans whose skills are not much in demand, isolated communities, indigenous people or those discriminated against and excluded; or, alternatively, they may be individuals unable to participate in

economic activity because of illness, disability or old age. In the case of the former, public policy, by example and specific programmes, may have a catalytic role. In the case of the latter, the emphasis may have to be placed on family and community efforts within the means available. How to apportion attention and scarce resources to the most disadvantaged while mobilizing resources to improve the situation of the much larger population in circumstances nearly as extreme will continue to be a critical challenge to the inventiveness of Governments and communities.

16. In some countries, levels of poverty tend to be more sharply defined. Here, one can distinguish anti-poverty strategies that are separate from, but complementary to, overall development policies. Focusing attention and concentrating resources on specific groups needing support can be expected to make a decisive impact, and significant numbers in the targeted groups can be expected to rise out of poverty.

17. In such countries, information on who is in poverty and why is likely to be more comprehensive and systematic. Setting a poverty line and targets for lifting people above it may be more readily used as practical tools of policy. But, even in these countries, there is often a lack of standard data to understand the full extent and nature of poverty, and progress made in dealing with it. Developing and using a variety of methods - including gender-sensitive methods - of gathering and interpreting information, of both a quantitative and qualitative kind, should be seen as a priority. One unconventional method is the use of community monitors to assess local trends and to communicate such information to regional and national assessors. Some countries have experimented with monitors with a degree of success; this practice might be considered for wider application.

18. Countries might also consider planning to bring within a comprehensive framework geared to national needs and capacities various ad hoc measures initiated at different times to deal with specific forms of poverty, through various public, private or charitable initiatives. Within such a framework, developmental programmes need to be designed and progressively implemented, aimed at enhancing the capacity of disadvantaged citizens - for example, disabled persons - to become economically and socially productive members of society. As new resources permit, other measures may also be considered - a support network or safety net for people not able to fend for themselves, for example. Experimentation is needed with different combinations of partnership between public and private sectors, government at different levels, and community and voluntary organizations. The exchange of experience gained and of lessons learned needs to be facilitated, at the national, regional and international levels.

19. A major group of countries - the countries in transition from a planned to a market economy - have seen a rapid increase in the number of people living in poverty. This reflects the dislocations in production and in the provision of free, publicly financed services and benefits, price reforms and the reduction or withdrawal of subsidies on a wide range of basic consumer goods. These in turn are the consequence of the change in economic and social philosophies and the break-up of integrated economic systems or, in some cases, of countries.

20. The nature and pace of rehabilitation of these economies and a resumption of economic growth will be central to coping with and reducing poverty over the medium term. The ability of countries to absorb excess workers still employed in unprofitable State enterprises into new economic activities, in large and small new private enterprises, will be crucial. In the long run, anti-poverty strategies will need to focus on refashioning the former system of social services, social benefits, State provisions and subsidies into a system of social services and social protection appropriate for a market-based economy, in partnership between the State, the private sector and an active civil society.

21. The phenomenon of continuing poverty in countries with a high level of income and well developed, often comprehensive, social services, benefits and provision poses specific policy challenges. In these countries poverty is best seen in relative terms. According to their own definitions of what constitutes absolute poverty, pockets of such poverty are not unknown and have risen in some countries in recent years.

22. Emerging high levels of unemployment concentrated in particular groups, especially among young people, unskilled or older workers and minorities, will require attention to prevent the emergence of major enclaves of entrenched unemployment and accompanying social dependence or poverty. The working poor are another major group requiring attention. These are often one-adult households, predominantly headed by women with dependent children, in low-wage, irregular or part-time work. A third category comprises those out of work and receiving social support, typically at a level below the official poverty line. A major challenge to Governments is how to achieve the twin goals of enabling welfare recipients to become independent through work and raising the incomes of low-wage earners, either through measures enhancing their productivity or social measures such as tax credits, minimum incomes or other forms of supplementing their purchasing power. A variety of approaches is being tried at national and local levels. They require evaluation and, in turn, the dissemination of lessons learned and problems encountered.

23. High-income countries have in the recent past decades successfully put in place policies to deal with traditional causes of poverty, such as unemployment, sickness, disability or loss of income in old age. The effective level of protection offered to such groups has been reduced in many instances, and future levels of provision are being challenged. To prevent the reappearance in the future of the traditional causes of poverty as major factors, strategies to eradicate poverty need to consider the long-term viability of present social schemes in a period of rapid demographic, social and economic change, and new avenues of reform need to be explored. Part of this re-appraisal should include re-examination of the respective roles of the public and private sectors, including both for-profit and voluntary.

II. MEETING THE BASIC HUMAN NEEDS OF ALL

A. Main recommendations of the Copenhagen Programme of Action

24. The Programme of Action stipulated that Governments, in partnership with all other development actors, in particular with people living in poverty and

their organizations, should cooperate to meet the basic human needs of all, including people living in poverty and vulnerable groups, by:

(a) Ensuring universal access to basic social services, with particular efforts to facilitate access by people living in poverty and vulnerable groups;

(b) Creating public awareness that the satisfaction of basic human needs is an essential element of poverty reduction; these needs are closely interrelated and comprise nutrition, health, water and sanitation, education, employment, housing and participation in cultural and social life;

(c) Ensuring full and equal access to social services, especially education, legal services and health-care services for women of all ages and children, recognizing the rights, duties and responsibilities of parents and other persons legally responsible for children, consistent with the Convention on the Rights of the Child;

(d) Ensuring that due priority is given and adequate resources made available, at the national, regional and international levels, to combat the threat to individual and public health posed by the rapid spread of HIV/AIDS globally and by the re-emergence of major diseases, such as tuberculosis, malaria, onchocerciasis (river blindness) and diarrhoeal diseases, in particular cholera;

(e) Taking particular actions to enhance the productive capacities of indigenous people, ensuring their full and equal access to social services and their participation in the elaboration and implementation of policies that affect their development, with full respect for their cultures, languages, traditions and forms of social organizations, as well as their own initiatives;

(f) Providing appropriate social services to enable vulnerable people and people living in poverty to improve their lives, to exercise their rights and to participate fully in all social, economic and political activities and to contribute to social and economic development;

(g) Recognizing that improving people's health is inseparably linked to a sound environment;

(h) Ensuring physical access to all basic social services for persons who are older, disabled or home-bound;

(i) Ensuring that people living in poverty have full and equal access to justice, including knowledge of their rights and, as appropriate, free legal assistance. The legal system should be made more sensitive and responsive to the needs and special circumstances of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in order to ensure a strong and independent administration of justice;

(j) Promoting full restorative services, in particular for those who require institutional care or are home-bound, and a comprehensive array of community-based, long-term care services for those facing loss of independence.

25. Governments should implement the commitments that have been made to meet the basic needs of all, with assistance from the international community, consistent with chapter V of the Programme of Action, including the following:

(a) By the year 2000, universal access to basic education and completion of primary education by at least 80 per cent of primary school-age children; closing the gender gap in primary and secondary school education by the year 2005; universal primary education in all countries before the year 2015;

(b) By the year 2000, life expectancy of not less than 60 years in any country;

(c) By the year 2000, reduction of mortality rates of infants and children under five years of age by one third of the 1990 level, or 50-70 per 1,000 live births, whichever is less; by the year 2015, achievement of an infant mortality rate below 35 per 1,000 live births and an under-five mortality rate below 45 per 1,000;

(d) By the year 2000, a reduction in maternal mortality by one half of the 1990 level; by the year 2015, a further reduction by one half;

(e) Achieving food security by ensuring a safe and nutritionally adequate food supply, at both the national and international levels, a reasonable degree of stability in the supply of food, and physical, social and economic access to enough food for all, while reaffirming that food should not be used as a tool for political pressure;

(f) By the year 2000, a reduction of severe and moderate malnutrition among children under five years of age to half of the 1990 level;

(g) By the year 2000, attainment by all peoples of the world of a level of health that will permit them to lead a socially and economically productive life, and to that end, ensuring primary health care for all;

(h) Making accessible through the primary health-care system reproductive health to all individuals of appropriate ages as soon as possible and no later than the year 2015, in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, 5/ and taking into account the reservations and declarations made at that Conference, especially those concerning the need for parental guidance and parental responsibility;

(i) Strengthening efforts and increasing commitments with the aim, by the year 2000, of reducing malaria mortality and morbidity by at least 20 per cent compared to 1995 levels in at least 75 per cent of affected countries, and reducing social and economic losses due to malaria in the developing countries, especially in Africa, where the overwhelming majority of both cases and deaths occur;

(j) By the year 2000, eradicating, eliminating or controlling major diseases constituting global health problems, in accordance with paragraph 6.12 of Agenda 21;

(k) Reducing the adult illiteracy rate - the appropriate age group to be determined in each country - to at least half its 1990 level, with an emphasis on female literacy; achieving universal access to quality education, with particular priority being given to primary and technical education and job training, combating illiteracy, and eliminating gender disparities in access to, retention in and support for education;

(l) Providing, on a sustainable basis, access to safe drinking water in sufficient quantities, and proper sanitation for all;

(m) Improving the availability of affordable and adequate shelter for all, in accordance with the Global Strategy for Shelter to the Year 2000; 6/

(n) Monitoring the implementation of those commitments at the highest appropriate level and considering the possibility of expediting their implementation through the dissemination of sufficient and accurate statistical data and appropriate indicators.

26. Access to social services for people living in poverty and vulnerable groups should be improved through:

(a) Facilitating access and improving the quality of education for people living in poverty by establishing schools in unserved areas, providing social services, such as meals and health care, as incentives for families in poverty to keep children in school, and improving the quality of schools in low-income communities;

(b) Expanding and improving opportunities for continuing education and training by means of public and private initiatives and non-formal education in order to improve opportunities for people living in poverty, including people with disabilities, and in order to develop the skills and knowledge that they need to better their conditions and livelihoods;

(c) Expanding and improving preschool education, both formal and non-formal, including through new learning technologies, radio and television, to overcome some of the disadvantages faced by young children growing up in poverty;

(d) Ensuring that people living in poverty and low-income communities have access to quality health care that provides primary health-care services, consistent with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, free of charge or at affordable rates;

(e) Promoting cooperation among government agencies, health-care workers, non-governmental organizations, women's organizations and other institutions of civil society in order to develop a comprehensive national strategy for improving reproductive health care and child health-care services and ensuring that people living in poverty have full access to those services, including, inter alia, education and services on family planning, safe motherhood and prenatal and postnatal care, and the benefits of breast-feeding, consistent with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development;

(f) Encouraging health-care workers to work in low-income communities and rural areas, and providing outreach services to make health care available to otherwise unserved areas, recognizing that investing in a primary health-care system that ensures prevention, treatment and rehabilitation for all individuals is an effective means of promoting social and economic development as well as broad participation in society.

B. Areas for policy development and further discussion

27. Meeting the basic human needs of all will directly improve the lives of large numbers of the poor and underserved. It also constitutes an investment which contributes to the long-term benefit of the economy and society.

28. In low-income countries where the basic needs of large numbers of people are not met and large segments of the population are not served by even the most rudimentary services, expanding the coverage of services will need to be the main priority. Even here, with few resources, clear criteria for selecting the sequencing of the expansion of services need to be established. Some services, or goals, serve multiple purposes or have significant secondary effects. Thus expansion of basic education will be high on the list of priorities, in particular the education of girls. Programmes targeted at women through health-care and nutrition programmes, for example, and programmes in favour of children have been found to produce particularly beneficial direct and secondary results. The situation will vary from country to country, and locality to locality, requiring flexibility in approaches.

29. In expanding services, adequate provision needs to be made for the maintenance of social infrastructure and meeting recurrent costs. Another consideration is the quality of services. How quickly expansion is possible so that the services will be sustained or the quality maintained is a matter of local judgement but always needs careful review. The cost of extending basic services tends to rise as one advances towards full coverage - for example, where services are extended to isolated communities or into sparsely populated areas, or because there is a need to provide for the support structure. As coverage expands, demand for an increased level of service or improved quality often follows, and the political and social implications of this must be kept in mind. For instance, a rapid increase in primary enrolment tends to increase the numbers wishing to continue into secondary education; or, once people are accustomed to basic health care, there is demand for more, and more sophisticated, provision. The challenge to Governments can be clearly seen from the experience of many countries where superior services coexist with an almost total absence of basic services in numerous communities.

30. The question of resources will inevitably loom large in decisions about the possible rates of expanding and improving services. One common feature among recent success stories from different regions has been the commitment of their Governments to invest relatively large amounts in basic social services. The extent to which users, especially poor persons, should bear some of the cost of these services is problematic. User charges have both practical advantages and disadvantages. The dilemma can be best summarized thus: user fees can increase the resources available for expanding services or improving their quality -

although their contribution to fiscal revenue is very limited - while at the same time limiting access to them for many individuals - the poor, in particular. Recent experimentation has been along the lines of a mix of charges or fees and free or subsidized provision of particular categories of basic services to specific segments of the population. These matters can be resolved only in the light of a given situation on the ground and pragmatically, assisted by some broad overall guidelines that may be distilled from experience in a variety of situations.

31. The focus needs to be kept on the goal of reaching universal coverage of basic services, while considering longer-term needs for improving and maintaining quality. Countries may also find it useful to review periodically the administrative arrangements for the provision of services, including the allocation of responsibilities among entities of government and at different levels, the need for horizontal and vertical coordination as systems become more complex, and sources of finance. In many countries there will be a dual or parallel system of public and private provision. The balance between public and private provision, various forms of partnerships in the delivery of services, and the role of voluntary and community-based provision needs review and periodic adjustment, based on experience and emerging needs.

32. Countries in transition face very particular problems. Having already achieved in essence universal coverage and met basic human needs, they are now having to deal, in many cases, with the disintegration or partial disintegration of services and benefit systems. Improvisation has been the order of the day, and some programmes and beneficiaries have fared better than others. The basic task now is to re-establish a system of provision appropriate to the new basis of organizing the economy and put in place the appropriate legal basis and administrative structures, explore and formalize partnership options for cooperation between public and private sectors and modernize legal structures for the functioning and growth of organizations of civil society.

33. In higher-income countries there remain communities that are underserved, contrasting with the typically high quality of provision. One major challenge is to retain the already achieved coverage and quality in the face of new resource constraints and obvious weaknesses of some of the programmes in the contemporary setting. The political and professional debate has in recent years focused, and is likely to continue to focus, on a number of major questions: the relationship between a high level of social provision and individual incentives to work and national competitiveness; the extent to which individual and family responsibility might be undermined by social provision; the relative efficiency of public and private provision and of various mixes of the two; how to divide responsibility among different levels of government; and how to keep costs in check. A particular issue in the wake of regional integration that is likely to assume greater importance in the future is the cross-national harmonization of provision and portability across frontiers of entitlements.

III. PROMOTION OF SELF-RELIANCE AND COMMUNITY-BASED INITIATIVES

A. Main recommendations of the Copenhagen Programme of Action

34. The Programme of Action stresses the importance of identifying the livelihood systems, survival strategies and self-help organizations of people living in poverty and working with such organizations to develop programmes for combating poverty that build on their efforts, ensuring the full participation of the people concerned and responding to their actual needs.

35. It calls for encouraging and supporting local community development projects that foster the skill, self-reliance and self-confidence of people living in poverty and that facilitate their active participation in efforts to eradicate poverty.

36. People living in poverty and their organizations should be empowered by:

(a) Involving them fully in the setting of targets and in the design, implementation, monitoring and assessment of national strategies and programmes for poverty eradication and community-based development, and ensuring that such programmes reflect their priorities;

(b) Integrating gender concerns in the planning and implementation of policies and programmes for the empowerment of women;

(c) Ensuring that policies and programmes affecting people living in poverty respect their dignity and culture and make full use of their knowledge, skills and resourcefulness;

(d) Strengthening education at all levels and ensuring the access to education of people living in poverty, in particular their access to primary education and other basic education opportunities;

(e) Encouraging and assisting people living in poverty to organize so that their representatives can participate in economic and social policy-making and work more effectively with governmental, non-governmental and other relevant institutions to obtain the services and opportunities they need;

(f) Placing special emphasis on capacity-building and community-based management;

(g) Educating people about their rights, the political system and the availability of programmes.

B. Areas for policy development and further discussion

37. In the past decade there has been a noticeable shift of opinion in attitudes to people living in poverty, seeing them as people possessing skills, knowledge and resources, often with well-developed survival strategies. The hidden resources possessed by people living in poverty, if fostered, encouraged

and activated, can be a major force in raising individuals and communities out of poverty.

38. Self-help or community-based efforts have been the traditional basis of economic and social organization among subsistence and low-income populations and thus continue to be important in the survival strategies of millions of people. A mass of detailed research in recent years has revealed a rich fabric of support networks and mutual or community-based initiatives to deal with everyday problems of economic survival and social functioning. Improved, low-cost, information exchange, travel and networking opportunities, local activism to protect the rights of local citizens confronting externally imposed development projects, and government-supported community activism and mobilization for local development have given a new dynamism to such efforts.

39. Experience of several decades of development planning and practice has also demonstrated that successful implementation often depends on building partnerships involving all elements in society that will be affected or may be expected to benefit or contribute to a development activity. In particular, the knowledge of intended beneficiaries, however poor or apparently unskilled, has, where sought, made a significant contribution to the success of many undertakings and - when not sought - to the failure of others.

40. The challenge for Governments now is to build on measures that have succeeded, to foster, encourage and assist the growth of such self-reliant and community-based initiatives and to do so without wielding a heavy bureaucratic hand or micro-managing. Options that need to be explored in different settings include: the establishment of a clear legal and institutional framework, for example, for the functioning of cooperatives or mutual-aid societies; dissemination of information; creation of institutional mechanisms to mediate between government and citizens or community groups for the transmittal and exchange of information and provision of training materials; facilitating networking within countries and with related international umbrella organizations; and creating mechanisms for the funnelling of micro-scale grants and other forms of seed money.

41. In many countries, self-reliant and community-based initiatives have in the past shown exceptional dynamism. Initiatives from many different groups in society have proliferated: environmentalists, peasant groups, slum dwellers and indigenous people are notable examples. The key issues from a public policy perspective will be how to bring coherence to these disparate initiatives so that they can focus efforts on priorities at the regional and national levels and how best to develop partnerships between community-based and public authority efforts without stifling the spontaneity, energy and capacity for innovation of the poor.

42. Countries in transition, where such community-based efforts had not been especially encouraged - or have been discouraged - are experiencing a partial renaissance in voluntarism and self-help, often organized around church activities or supported by emigrant communities around the world. Public policy will need to concern itself with the creation of appropriate legal frameworks for such activities and the organization of practical support, including information, networking and opportunities for international exchanges.

43. In higher-income countries organizations of civil society, including voluntary and charitable institutions, are very active and attract money and members in very impressive numbers, in spite of the rapid growth of State programmes, services and benefits covering a wide range of needs. In the past decade, the most dynamic growth has been in the mutual-help, support-group and self-advocacy type of grouping, often loosely organized and often without formal status. The more traditional, service-to-others, structured voluntary organizations have fared less well and have encountered difficulty in attracting additional donations and private contributions to expand or maintain their level of activity.

44. An important policy question in many countries concerns the future role of different forms of community-initiated programmes, particularly their relationship with established, organized voluntary or charitable organizations, their role in delivering publicly financed services, and, on the one hand, the compatibility of their advocacy role in support of the poor and disadvantaged, and on the other, their role as partners in developing and implementing public policy.

IV. COORDINATED INTERNATIONAL ACTION IN SUPPORT OF NATIONAL AND LOCAL EFFORTS

A. Main recommendations of the Copenhagen Programme of Action

45. Social development and the implementation of the Programme of Action, including the provisions relating specifically to the goal of eradicating poverty, are primarily the responsibility of Governments, although international cooperation and assistance are essential. The Programme of Action, in this context, sets out a number of recommendations concerning the mobilization of financial resources, including external resources, and the appropriate contribution of the United Nations system. Important recommendations to this effect are also set out in chapter I, on an enabling environment for social development.

46. Specifically in relation to poverty eradication, the Programme of Action stipulates that members of the international community should, bilaterally or through multilateral organizations, foster an enabling environment by:

(a) Coordinating policies and programmes to support the measures being taken in the developing countries, particularly in Africa and the least developed countries, to eradicate poverty, provide remunerative work and strengthen social integration in order to meet basic social development goals and targets;

(b) Promoting international cooperation to assist developing countries, at their request, in their efforts, in particular at the community level, towards achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women;

(c) Strengthening the capacities of developing countries to monitor the progress of national poverty eradication plans and to assess the impact of

national and international policies and programmes on people living in poverty and address their negative impacts;

(d) Strengthening the capacity of countries with economies in transition to develop their social protection systems and social policies for, inter alia, the reduction of poverty;

(e) Addressing the special needs of small island developing States with respect to eradicating poverty and meeting poverty eradication goals and targets, within the context of social development programmes that reflect their national priorities;

(f) Addressing the problems faced by the land-locked developing countries in eradicating poverty and supporting their efforts aimed at social development;

(g) Supporting societies disrupted by conflict in their efforts to rebuild their social protection systems and eradicate poverty;

(h) Strengthening and improving financial and technical assistance for community-based development and self-help programmes and strengthening cooperation among Governments, community organizations, cooperatives, formal and informal banking institutions, private enterprises and international agencies, with the aim of mobilizing local savings, promoting the creation of local financial networks, and increasing the availability of credit and market information to small entrepreneurs, small farmers and other low-income self-employed workers, with particular efforts to ensure the availability of such services to women.

B. Areas for policy development and further discussion

47. International development assistance is, in principle, directed to poverty eradication or alleviation, either by raising the average level of living of countries or improving the circumstances of specific groups living in poverty, or both.

48. The traditional North/South flow of both financial or material resources and knowledge or skills has more recently been broadened as it has come to be realized that the most suitable knowledge, skills, know-how and technical expertise were not necessarily to be found in the high-income countries. International cooperation is now more an exchange of specific expertise and experience among countries, irrespective of their overall levels of material development. Financial resources are also more diversified by source but continue to be mobilized predominantly in developed countries.

49. The first area of policy that needs to be discussed is the flow of assistance for anti-poverty and related social development programmes. There are many difficulties in measuring the precise flow. According to one estimate, the flow of bilateral assistance for basic services - basic education, primary health, safe drinking water and sanitation, family planning and nutrition programmes - amounted in 1992 to roughly $4 billion (15 member countries of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation

and Development (OECD)), or 7 per cent of their total official development assistance, with the corresponding figure for multilateral institutions being 16 per cent. Total official development assistance going to the 10 countries with the highest number of poor people, accounting for some two thirds of the world's poor, was estimated in 1992 at $17 per capita. At this level the impact of development assistance on the incidence of poverty can at best be marginal. Hence there is an urgent need to raise the flow of assistance that goes more or less directly to support anti-poverty and related employment and social development programmes.

50. A specific proposal referred to in the Copenhagen Programme of Action which commands some support is the 20/20 compact whereby interested developing countries would allocate 20 per cent of their national budgets to programmes to meet basic human needs and interested donor partners would allocate 20 per cent of aid budgets for corresponding programmes. A recent meeting between donor countries and programme countries, hosted by the Government of Norway, helped to develop this idea further in terms of definitions and modalities for implementation. Specific commitments regarding the 20/20 compact were made by several countries.

51. From the United Nations, support at the country level is being provided by several agencies, funds and programmes, including the United Nations Development Programme, to a range of activities in connection with the development of national strategies for poverty eradication, including research, policy dialogue, formulation and implementation. In furtherance of chapter V of the Plan of Action of the Social Summit and Assembly resolution 50/120 on operational activities for development, great emphasis is being placed on improved coordination at the country level through the resident coordinator system and on UNDP's role in organizing the efforts of the United Nations system towards capacity-building at all levels and its support of coordinated implementation of social development programmes through its network of field offices. As far as inter-agency mechanisms are concerned, the setting up of task forces by ACC is a valuable example of how the system can be coordinated in providing guidelines, particularly on poverty eradication, at the country level which draws upon the policy outcome of recent conferences. This provides an integrated and harmonious United Nations-system approach in support of country-level follow-up.

52. An important change that is required is the shift from a project to programme approach. Since donor resources are but a small part of what is required for poverty eradication and social development, a project-based approach to development assistance leads perhaps to a few sporadic showcase examples. To be effective, development assistance has to be a part of national priorities and national efforts. This is in a sense what a programme approach would seek to do. In addition a programme approach would facilitate a range of interventions - for instance, in education, health care etc., which would reinforce each other.

53. The implementation of a programme approach would be greatly facilitated by the integrated strategies for poverty eradication that all countries are to formulate as part of the commitment under the Copenhagen Programme of Action. The responses of Governments to the request of the Secretary-General to

designate a focal point for the follow-up to the Social Summit and their activities relating to the eradication of poverty in the context of the International Year suggest that this process is already under way.

54. Development cooperation for social and poverty programmes has confronted problems particular to the subject areas. These problems may be summarized under three headings:

(a) Diffused responsibility within Governments for social and anti-poverty programmes;

(b) Weak status of ministries of social affairs in many countries;

(c) Changing donor priorities and complex donor procedures.

55. The formulation of integrated strategies, including a gender perspective, would to a certain extent help to coordinate the work of various departments involved in poverty reduction. It would also provide a vehicle for coordinating donor support. In order for this to happen, these integrated strategies formulated by the programme countries themselves should become the centrepiece of the donor programme country dialogue.

56. Social development tends to have a long-term focus, and the benefits are often intangible. Donor agencies typically have shorter planning horizons and wish to see not only more immediate but also more tangible results. Greater attention needs to be given to how these contradictions can be reconciled.

57. Development assistance is often used to test new approaches and solutions. Pilot projects tend to be expert-intensive and thus expensive. More attention needs to be given, at all stages of project design, to ensuring that they lend themselves to wide replication at much lower unit cost. More attention also needs to be given, in both developing and donor countries, to ensuring that projects can become self-supporting after donor support ceases. Thus, in deciding investments in the social area, both parties need to consider more carefully the maintenance costs involved and the sources of funds for recurrent expenses, especially for staffing. At the same time, programmes can be supported more effectively with a more flexible approach to meeting local and recurrent costs, which tend to be particularly significant in the social area.

58. Current donor procedures are often time-consuming. They place a heavy burden on personnel in developing countries, which ministries of social affairs or welfare especially find difficult to shoulder. Efforts need to be made to streamline bureaucratic procedures, bearing in mind the need for appropriate public accountability, so that the dialogue between cooperating countries can focus on the substance of activities.

Notes

1/ Report of the International Conference on Social Development, Copenhagen, 6-12 March 1995 (A/CONF.166/9), chap. I, resolution 1, annexes I and II.

2/ See General Assembly resolution 48/183.

3/ See General Assembly resolution 50/107.

4/ Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992, vol. I, Resolutions Adopted by the Conference (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8), resolution 1, annex II.

5/ Report of the International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, 5-13 September 1994 (A/CONF.171/13 and Add.1), chap. I, resolution 1, annex.

6/ See General Assembly resolution 43/181.